

Building An Invisible Ladder

I turned a room full of laptops into a chapel
And called it work. I turned work
Into a language no one could dream in
Until I got back here with my hands full
Of wires and weather. I have always known
The machine was never the machine.
It was the man waiting on the other side
For permission to be less alone.

I don't remember when I first mistook
Competence for safety. Maybe
A boy learns early that if he can fix
The thing with the blinking light,
No one will ask about the dark
Behind his eyes. Maybe the last century
Is just one long help desk ticket
Marked urgent by people who broke
What they were told would save them.

I have been called architect
Because men prefer a blueprint
To a wound. They love a clean diagram,
A box for intake, a box for output,
A line between them thin enough
To pretend nothing human passes through.
But I know what moves beneath the floor.
I know every system has a basement
Where the old grief hums.

God help the founder
Who turns tenderness into infrastructure.
God help the builder

Who keeps naming his children
CLARITY, PRISM, CADENCE, and PROOF,
As if a good acronym could stand
At the edge of chaos and say,
Not that one. This one is mine.

I made a ladder no one could see
Because Appalachia has been handed
Enough ladders missing rungs.
I made intelligence for Main Street
Because Main Street has been studied
By men who never had to park there,
Never had to watch a good woman
Tape a sign to a door that said closed
When what she meant was tired.

I am from the part of the country
People love from a distance.
They call it resilient
When they mean abandoned beautifully.
They call it authentic
When they mean poor with music.
They call it forgotten
As if forgetting were weather
And not a policy written by fancy ties.

I turned my anger into a company.
Then I turned the company into a question:
What if technology could feel human
Without lying about being human?
What if the voice in the room
Did not pretend to have a body
But still knew what a body costs?

What if software learned restraint
Before it learned charm?

Listen. I have loved the future
In spite of its investors.
I have watched men sell empathy
By the seat, annually,
With premium onboarding and retainer.
I have watched platforms promise connection
While making loneliness searchable.
Still I keep building.
Not because I trust the age.
Because I know the hunger under it.

There is a version of me
That wanted only to be brilliant.
Poor thing. Someone should have fed him.
Someone should have told him brilliance
Is just loneliness wearing polished shoes

And collecting business cards
Unless it bends a knee
And becomes useful.

So I made tools for the meeting
After the meeting,
For the sentence before the damage,
For the worker who knows the truth
But not the approved format,
For the owner whose life story
Is not a decorative field
But the infrastructure.

I have been many men
Trying not to become one kind of machine.

Founder. Architect. Dreamer. Witness.
Translator of human static.
Son of a region told to be grateful
For rescue disguised as extraction.
Citizen of every room
Where the smartest person present
Still cannot say what hurts.

Do not ask me whether this is hope.
Hope is too often a brochure
With mountains on the cover
And nothing inside about rent.
Call it discipline.
Call it a hand on the breaker box.
Call it refusing to let the dark
Take credit for being deep.

I am still building the system
That might have saved me
From needing so many systems.
That is either madness or mercy.
Most days, I cannot tell.
Most days, I keep naming the parts.

Because love, if it is anything,
Is not softness.
It is architecture with room
For the damaged to enter
Without apologizing for their weight.

Because intelligence, if it is anything,
Is not the answer arriving clean.
It is the door we hold open

Long enough for the truth
To come in limping.

Because I am what builders call
A man still alive—alive
Being any structure
That learned how to hold.